

## FIRST FALLS, SECOND FALLS, AND FIRST AND SECOND LAKES, NORTH FORK BIG PINE CREEK, CALIFORNIA

The hike up the North Fork of Big Pine Creek passes First Falls and Second Falls on the way to the seven Big Pine Lakes, Black Lake, and Summit Lake. For this hike, we had originally only planned to go to Second Falls, but the trail is nicely maintained and there was no snow on it, so the hiking was relatively easy and we continued on to the first two of the Big Pine Lakes.

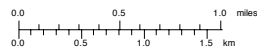
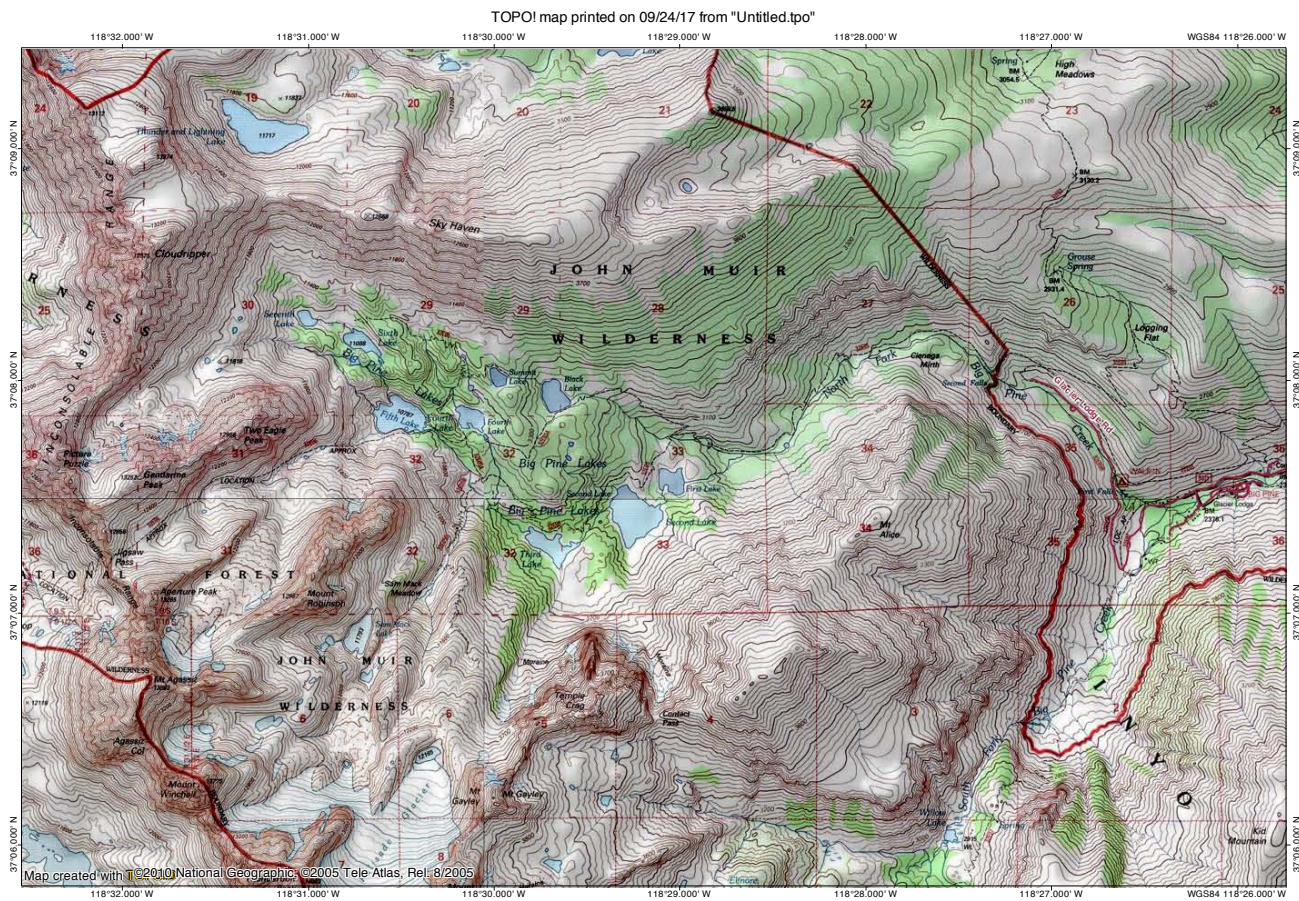
On our way out, we followed the old Glacier Lodge Road, which leads to near the base of the cliffs down which Second Falls flows on the left side, then switchbacks up the hillside to the north. On the way back, we followed a different trail, down the side of the ridge to the north of the canyon, to get different views. The trails split at the top of First Falls and rejoin before reaching Second Falls.

Past Second Falls but before reaching the lakes is a cabin which was originally built for an actor by a famous architect, then was used as a ranger cabin.

When researching hikes in this part of the eastern Sierras, I had originally planned to visit the South Fork of Big Pine Creek. However, I soon found (on the Inyo National Forest webpage) that the bridge on the south fork trail had been destroyed in 2011, and since we would be doing this hike in June we would not be able to cross the creek due to high water flow.

Note: After doing this hike, I read that there is a steel bridge which crosses the outlet of South Lake, and which hikers can use to access the other side of the lake than we visited. There is also an old stone dam on this side of South Lake.

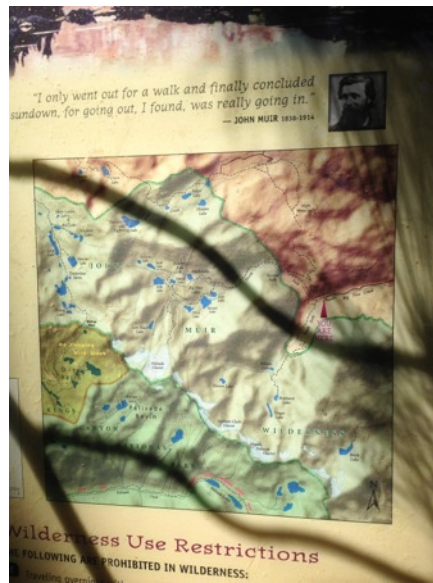
TOPO map of the trail to the seven Big Pine Lakes, Summit Lake, and Black Lake, which are located in the north fork of Big Pine Creek.



Looking towards Glacier Lodge from the day-hike parking area for Big Pine Creek.



The trailheads in this area have good maps.



The trail starts out following an old road along the creek through some nice pine trees.





Looking across the creek and up at the valley down which the South Fork of Big Pine Creek flows.



Here we are crossing a bridge across the North Fork of Big Pine Creek.



Looking down the creek from near the bridge.



Notice how the water is raging down the creek here. Also, there appears to be a water pipe which catches water coming down the creek here. I wonder if it is (or at some point was) going to the nearby Glacier Lodge.



Looking up the creek here. I think this is sometimes referred to as "First Falls" (see the TOPO map above).



Just past the bridge, we encountered this small creek, which had a nice cascade above the trail.



This is the hikers "shortcut" for the North Fork trail (right). One can continue straight (left) here to reach the South Fork trail. The path straight is also part of an old road, which eventually switchbacks and rejoins the North Fork trail.



Looking up the South Fork. It appears that hikers reach good scenery faster in the South Fork than in the North Fork, so I was disappointed that the bridge had been washed out and we couldn't hike up the South Fork.



HDR photo of a nice rock staircase to aid hikers in climbing the hillside here.





There were a few of these pretty flowers in this area. I am not sure what they are called.



Here we have rejoined the old road; continuing straight in this photo would take a hiker to the South Fork trail.



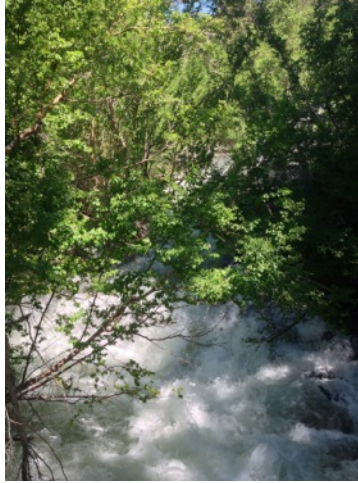
This is the "shortcut" trail we came up.



Up ahead, the trail reaches a collection of big pine trees.



The trail soon crosses a bridge over the North Fork of Big Pine Creek again, where the water is still raging down.



After crossing the creek, the trail joins with the backpackers' route, which comes from a larger parking area further down the main road.



This is an alternate trail, which we took on the way back. It eventually joins with a trail which crosses the ridge to the north towards another interesting hiking area.



The main trail continues up the valley, following the creek.





Looking back at the nice bridge across the creek here.



The Big Pine Creek is to the left of the trail, but there was a small stream flowing down the trail as well. It wasn't really possible to avoid walking in this stream, so I was glad I had worn waterproof boots.



Looking up the hillside to the north, where there is a surprisingly large number of blooming plants with yellow flowers. We would see this area again, from above, on our hike back.



Continuing up the trail, we saw more big pine trees, likely the source of the name of this creek and the nearby town.





A closer photo of some of these yellow flowers, which seemed to be more prevalent higher up the hillside.



Looking ahead, up the canyon, we could see where we would gain elevation again and would encounter Second Falls.



Looking back down the trail and across at some of the peaks on the south side of the South Fork.



Panorama looking up at the hillside to the north of us, which we would be hiking along on our way back.



Up ahead, more big pine trees provided some welcome shade. This trail was one of the few in the area which was free of snow in June 2017, because it is in a more exposed area and hence the snow melts sooner. That also made it a warmer hike, although fortunately we encountered very few mosquitoes.



Soon, we leave the North Fork of Big Pine Creek and the big pine trees, and are crossing an open area. Second Falls can just barely be seen to the left of center in this photo.



Looking at the trail here, notice the red wildflowers lining the sides of the trail.





This is the end of the old road from Glacier Lodge, and now the trail turns into a smaller path before switchbacking up the hillside to the north.



Here is another photo of the red flowers, sometimes called indian paintbrush, which we have been seeing along the trail through here.



Looking back down the valley as the trail switchbacks. There are a few smaller pine trees here which provide welcome shade.



Notice the prominent weathered pine tree up ahead.

